

A Review of Dr. Yasir Qadhi’s “Advanced Aqidah” Course

by

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In a Facebook post dated December 22, 2019,¹ Dr. Yasir Qadhi announced that an “Advanced Aqidah” course was being offered for the Spring Semester of 2020 at The Islamic Seminary of America (TISA), of which he is—as of the writing of this article—dean. As someone deeply interested in reading scholarly works on Islamic theology produced by both traditional Muslim and Western academic scholars, I decided to check out the course.

The course comprised of 13 different classes:

- Class 1: Origins of Kalām
- Class 2: The Mu‘tazilites
- Class 3: The Rise of Ash‘arī Thought
- Class 4: Mātūrīdism
- Class 5: Proto-Shī‘ism and the Main Sects
- Class 6: Seveners and the Ghulāt
- Class 7: Sufism Part 1
- Class 8: Sufism Part 2
- Class 9: Ḥanbalism
- Class 10: Wahhābism
- Class 11: Qadar
- Class 12: Student Presentations Part 1
- Class 13: Student Presentations Part 2

I benefitted from parts of the course and learned some interesting things, such as:

- Imam al-Ash‘arī in his *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn* was more precise and fair in describing the stances of the Mu‘tazilites when compared to other heresiographers.²

¹ See [here](#).

² Class 2, 40:10 onward.

- Those closest to the Mu‘tazilites today are the Zaydīs, for they adopted all the [five principles](#) of *‘Itizāl*, while the Ibādīs did not adopt the principle of “threats and punishments” (*al-wa‘d wal-wa‘īd*).³
- How the Ash‘arī school developed theologically and politically over time.⁴
- How to understand the various esoteric (*Bāṭinī*) groups out there.⁵
- Understanding the connection between Gnosticism and some theological elements of taṣawwuf.⁶
- Knowing how Sufi orders developed.⁷

Nevertheless, this useful and beneficial instruction was overshadowed by considerable shortcomings in the course, spanning issues including, but not limited to, specious contentions, precarious bias, and inadequate commitment to theological orthodoxy. I will expand on these issues⁸ in the remainder of this article. I will break the points down into two different sections, 1) Central Problems, and 2) Peripheral Issues, as you can see below:

Central Problems:

- Dr. Qadhi’s Praise of Western Academia and Belittlement of Traditional Islamic Scholarship
- Dr. Qadhi’s Revealing and Important Admission Regarding His Methodology
- Dr. Qadhi’s Mountain Out of a Molehill – on Beliefs Being “Reactionary”
- Dr. Qadhi’s Muddled Stance on Orthodoxy
- Dr. Qadhi’s Stance Toward the Mu‘tazilites

³ Class 2, 1:29:40-1:30:40.

⁴ Most of Classes 3 and 4.

⁵ Class 6. Despite my reservations regarding some of the things Dr. Qadhi taught about the Islamic status of some of these groups, this class was nevertheless still very educational and informative.

⁶ The first segment of Class 7.

⁷ Class 7, 1:23:20

⁸ I would like to point out that most of these issues are already present in the scattered writings and public lectures of Dr. Qadhi. However, it is useful to address his remarks as stated in the course since it conveniently strings them all together. It is also reasonable to presume that in preparation for this academic course, as opposed to a less formal public lecture, Dr. Qadhi was better prepared to express himself and furnish evidence supporting his claims.

- Dr. Qadhi's Unsettling Remarks Regarding Imam Aḥmad and His Followers
- Dr. Qadhi's Negligence in Giving Proper Direction to His Students

Peripheral Issues:

- Dr. Qadhi's Fixation On and Misuse of Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī
- Dr. Qadhi's Parroting of a Historical Error
- Dr. Qadhi on Whether "Salafism" is "One Thing"
- Dr. Qadhi's Faulty Analogy of 'Alī's (r) Attitude Toward the Kharijites
- Dr. Qadhi on Najdism and Taṣawwuf

The "Central Problems" section deals with issues which I believe are seriously concerning about the course, as they fatally undermine the course's purpose of better equipping Muslims to become more critical and academically proficient *while* retaining their unwavering commitment to orthodoxy. On the other hand, the "peripheral issues" section primarily deals with matters that are not as relevant, but where I would like to weigh in with counter viewpoints and challenge some of Dr. Qadhi's remarks and conclusions.

Central Problems:

Dr. Qadhi's Praise of Western Academia and Belittlement of Traditional Islamic Scholarship

A regrettable aspect of Dr. Qadhi's course is that it undoubtedly conveys the message that Western academics who study Islam are superior to traditional Muslim scholars in terms of academic competence, objectivity, credibility, and precision. This is continuously projected across subtly by Dr. Qadhi to the students taking the course, while at other times it is done quite explicitly. Below I provide Dr. Qadhi's remarks to help the reader get an idea of what I am referring to.

Regarding the assigned texts for the course from [*The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*](#), Dr. Qadhi says:

"I have studied at advanced institutions in the Islamic world. I have hundreds of books on theology written by Muslims and non-Muslims. And this type of writing that we are reading, **it is simply non-existent in the Muslim world. Simply non-existent.** I studied Mu'tazilism, and Ash'arism, and Najdism, I studied this in Medina with experts in the field. And mashallah, they have done a lot of good work, and I have most of their works; in fact, almost everything is important; it's my specialty. **And then**

you read this type of stuff⁹ and not only do they do a better job and more accurate, they also go far more detailed...And I hope if you read these articles with an open mind, you will see for yourself; there is nothing equivalent.”¹⁰

Commenting on Dr. Josef van Ess’s encyclopedic work on Islamic theology, Dr. Qadhi says:

“When I came from Medina to Yale, and I was exposed to this book in German...and I’m just fresh out of Medina...**and I found this book and I was almost literally drooling.** Like I could not believe that one person had done this...”¹¹

Regarding Dr. Aron Zysow, Dr. Qadhi states:

“Aron Zysow, a good friend of mine, not a good friend, an acquaintance, **but a genius, genius, this guy’s a total genius...**”¹²

Concerning Dr. Jon Hoover, Dr. Qadhi says:

“Jon Hoover is an academic who I greatly admire, a good friend of mine. **Out of all people in the world** who were tasked to write this book,¹³ **had it been anybody other than Jon Hoover,** I would have been irritated.”¹⁴

Now, let us contrast this praise for Western non-Muslim academics with how Dr. Qadhi thinks of institutions in the Islamic world along with their faculty and students:

“We need to be a little bit more critical, and of course, that’s the purpose of the Islamic Seminary; that’s why we are where we are. Otherwise, **if you just wanted to be uncritical, you go to a tradition.** Go to the Salafis. Go to the Deobandis. Go to the Shiah. Go to the Zaydis. You will all find a well thought out tradition, **zero critical thinking.** Accept what the teachers teach you. **Even within Sunnism, go to Azhar vs. go to Medina vs. go to Dārul ‘Ulūm;** you have three separate trends. Each one of them is internally consistent; each one of them is presenting to you its own holistic paradigm, **and you are taught to absorb everything uncritically;** that’s fine. There’s room for that in the Ummah, and frankly, that’s the default. Most people are not going to be critical thinkers. But again, TISA¹⁵ is not one of those. TISA

⁹ He is referring to Western academic works such as the ones he assigned in class.

¹⁰ Class 2, 15:30-16:30

¹¹ Class 2, 30:21-30:49

¹² Class 4, 1:21:43-1:21:49

¹³ He is referring to Dr. Hoover’s introductory book on Ibn Taymiyyah; see [here](#).

¹⁴ Class 9, 1:14:34-1:14:45

¹⁵ The Islamic Seminary of America

is challenging you to think. Challenging you to contextualize yourself. Challenging you to understand the tradition from within.”¹⁶

These generalized condescending remarks are extremely unfortunate.¹⁷ Regrettably, this is the sentiment that is constantly presented to students who have taken this course with Dr. Qadhi. And it requires no elaboration on my part to highlight the long-term spiritual and ideological adverse effects of believing in the academic superiority of the Western academy when it comes to Islamic scholarship.¹⁸

Moreover, I sense a great deal of exaggeration in Dr. Qadhi’s praise of *The Oxford Handbook of Theology*. I have personally read a few chapters from the book¹⁹ and while I value the scholarship exhibited by some of the authors, I am taken aback at Dr. Qadhi’s exaggerated praise of the book. I would be curious to know precisely what insights it offers which he deems to be so exceptionally unique and relevant²⁰ so as to justify the praise offered. The same goes for his unnecessarily exaggerated praise of Jon Hoover. His book

¹⁶ Class 7, 6:35-7:23; Dr. Qadhi expressed how unique TISA is by also stating:

“And I feel confident in stating that **there is nothing like this in the entire world**. I feel confident because I know most of the programs out there, and there is **nothing being taught with this type of paradigm** where we are believers and we are coming from the tradition, and yet, we are asking you to be critically challenging even as we ask you to retain your Iman, which is very difficult in the Western world.” (Class 13, 6:44:30-6:44:56)

¹⁷ Unfortunately, there is more. In the first half-hour of Class 5, where Dr. Qadhi discusses Shī‘ism, Dr. Qadhi consistently either praises Western academia for its supposed objectivity or undermines the reliability of traditional Islamic scholarship when it comes to its stances. It is so much so to the point where it is difficult to simultaneously agree with Dr. Qadhi’s remarks and have any real confidence in traditional scholarship anymore.

¹⁸ A lot could go wrong when you believe that those who criticize your religion and disbelieve in it actually know how to study it better than scholars who ascribe to your faith. Some might interject and say that there are many Muslims in the Western Islamic academy and that it is unfair to characterize Western academic studies as being some non-Muslim enterprise without qualification. Yes, that is true; and I have not done that. However, what is indisputable is that certain standards must be abided by in the academy, even by Muslims, and strict adherence to them would, in many instances, result in conclusions that conflict with Islamic orthodoxy.

¹⁹ To be precise, I have read the following chapters: 12, 16, 35, 36, and 37.

²⁰ **A significant emphasis on the word “relevant.”** Western contribution to Islamic scholarship is particularly appreciated for contextualizing historical events, examining the ascription of works to their respective authors, determining individual scholars’ views, biographies, examining the historical roots of certain beliefs, etc. They rarely, if ever, offer **relevant truth** to Muslims, for Muslims do not become enlightened about something **essential about their faith** as a result of Western academic scholarship. To even suggest that is the case is Islamically problematic on so many levels. Muslim scholars prioritize examining and understanding the Qur’an and Sunnah in order to teach Muslims their religion across all the sciences, be it theology, jurisprudence, Qur’anic and hadith interpretation, etc. The bulk of their energy is directed toward fulfilling this religious communal obligation. On the other hand, Western academics understandably have no interest in pursuing such endeavors, for their primary focus lies elsewhere. As a result, it is only expected that they would excel in certain domains compared to traditional Muslims who do not exert as nearly much effort in those fields. Hence, one must be nuanced and very specific about what he is speaking about when discussing the superiority of Western academic Islamic scholarship compared to traditional Islamic scholarship and avoid problematic generalizations.

on Ibn Taymiyyah is not extraordinary to the point that nobody else “in the world” could have done an equally good, or even better job.

Furthermore, while there is a basis to Dr. Qadhi’s point that Islamic institutions around the world could do more to improve their curricula and enhance critical learning,²¹ to so casually stereotype against traditional Muslim scholars and students of knowledge as being uncritical and biased is to basically undermine their credibility and destroy Muslims’ confidence in their very own religious authorities.²² And this is especially problematic if it is done while simultaneously propping up non-Muslim academics as authorities in the process. This is extremely irresponsible. At the very least, Dr. Qadhi could have acknowledged that despite these problems raveling Islamic institutions, that there still remains a sizable minority of critical and academically proficient traditional Muslim scholars one could look up to and hold in high esteem.²³

There is no shortage of ways for Dr. Qadhi to appreciate some of the beneficial works produced by Western academics in Islamic Studies without denigrating, *en masse*, the intellectual integrity of graduates from Islamic institutions, which is totally unwarranted.²⁴

Dr. Qadhi’s Revealing and Important Admission Regarding His Methodology

Dr. Qadhi said:

“The notion of being academic and neutral and liberal and open-minded. This is something that could only come out of our generation because, frankly, it’s unheard of in the past to contextualize the way we are doing and to say: “You know what? I see where you’re coming from. I see where you’re coming from.” It would be very difficult to do. Even somebody that I respect like Ibn Taymiyyah is only able to do it for some issues, and not others. In the attributes, he’s not sympathetic at all. And he’s very black and white. It’s either this way, or else you have gone into deviancy. The flipside, our detractors²⁵ accuse us, accuse me, of being a product of a Western mind, a Western education. And the response is: You know, you’re right. That’s a fact. That the way I’m thinking, and this “agreeing to disagree” is something you don’t find generally

²¹ I, for one, have been quite vocal for over 15 years about how poorly intellectually equipped many Muslim graduates from Islamic institutions are in terms of being capable of responding to criticisms against Islam.

²² Unintentionally, of course. I am only speaking about the necessary implications of Dr. Qadhi’s approach, not his personal and willful intentions.

²³ I am also specifically referring to ones who do not have any exposure to Western academic works.

²⁴ Dr. Qadhi is entitled to his opinion, but that does not mean that it is okay to express it so casually with young Muslim students still trying to grow in their knowledge. Lamenting about such things, if one must, should only be done around certain people, in specific venues, and in a particular manner. Sadly, Dr. Qadhi expresses similar thoughts in some of his public lectures as well.

²⁵ He is likely referring to traditional practicing Muslims who take issue with his Western academically influenced approach to studying and teaching Islam.

speaking in other parts of the world. But just because this paradigm is coming from Western academia, does that make it wrong? Is that invalid? And that's the deeper question that we need to then prove to our detractors."²⁶

There is a lot to unpack here.

First of all, Dr. Qadhi is making it sound like it is “only our generation,” particularly the Western one, which has been able to observe and study differing views objectively and fairly.²⁷ If this is not an indictment against the entire Islamic scholarly enterprise, I am not sure what is. There is a lamentable tone of conceit in such speech that should be shunned and avoided.

Secondly, everybody has a threshold of tolerance, including Dr. Qadhi himself, who would most certainly not validate all opinions and groups who proclaim to be Muslims. Thus, just because others disagree with Dr. Qadhi on the boundaries of tolerance and make it more restrictive than him, that does not give him any right to imply that they are not “academic,” “open-minded,” and “neutral.”²⁸ Muslim scholars have spilled so much ink on what constitutes valid and invalid disagreements. Will every one of them be correct? No. But to insinuate²⁹ that they all utilized flawed methods until non-Muslims came along to educate Muslims about it is a bold and problematic suggestion.³⁰

Thirdly, in answer to the question Dr. Qadhi posed at the end of the citation I presented above, I will say point-blank that the answer is “yes.” Yes, the *specific application* of this Islamically-foreign paradigm, which leads one to adopt significant conclusions related to theology in contradiction to traditionally-held stances, is invalid and wrong. As a Muslim, one should know better than to accept the idea that Muslims had to wait around 1400 years for non-Muslims to educate them on how to approach the study of their own faith in order

²⁶ Part 13, 5:30:35-5:31:42

²⁷ Even though, ironically, Dr. Qadhi himself admits “there is no such thing as an unbiased person” and that he himself “comes with an agenda” and that “it’s not gonna happen” that he will be teaching neutrally about topics such as Najdism for example, etc. (Class 10, 6:15-7:14, and 50:40).

²⁸ And that is the paradox of tolerance itself. Even Dr. Qadhi himself would be deemed ‘intolerant,’ ‘unacademic,’ and ‘close-minded’ by the likes of modernists, liberals, etc., so who is to say who is right then? Who has a correct understanding of the boundaries of religious tolerance? Some, like Dr. Qadhi, might prefer drawing inspiration from Western civilization, while others would prefer looking to emulating the dominant orthodox Sunni scholars during the period of the Salaf.

²⁹ As a necessary implication of Dr. Qadhi’s stance, not that he conceded this point explicitly.

³⁰ As I mentioned earlier, Western academics are not terribly invested in the types of commitments Muslim theologians will be indebted to (i.e. theological truths). They are able to observe past scholarly contributions “at a distance” and thus proffer insights and dispassionate reviews that are less prone to falling into disparagement and reflexive repudiation of deviants who break away from Islamic orthodoxy.

to determine which theological views³¹ are deemed legitimate or not. How Dr. Qadhi or anybody else cannot see the theological problem such an idea poses is truly perplexing.³²

Dr. Qadhi's Mountain Out of a Molehill – on Beliefs Being “Reactionary”

A constant question Dr. Qadhi kept asking students during the course was to imagine how Sunnism or Atharism or any other ism would have turned out if it were not for ripple effects prompted by certain events that transpired. For example, in Class 2, 1:24:20, Dr. Qadhi asked:

“We also have to be brave enough to see our brand of Islam and see how it was shaped by that strand. And this leads to a **very deep question**. I’m only going to verbalize it. **And I’m not even going to dare to answer it:** What would Sunnism be if *‘Itizāl* had never come?”

I was puzzled each time Dr. Qadhi raised this or a similar question, as I was always wondering what point he was actually trying to make.³³ It is surely an interesting thought experiment to imagine what anything would have become if certain counterfactual outcomes were actualized, but ultimately, what is the point?

We might submit the academy³⁴ to such a hypothetical too. What might Islamic studies in the West have looked like if it was not colored by a prefabricated frame of Christian studies? How much time would go into "source criticism" of the Islamic sources were it not for Biblical historical studies having profoundly undermined any claim of Biblical inerrancy? In light of this, we could even go further and ask how Dr. Qadhi's own views would have been shaped differently today if the academy, which so greatly influenced him, were any different.

The questions we could ask are endless;³⁵ however, if we are satisfied with the simple theological idea that Allah AlMighty had foreknowledge of everything and still ensured that the truth would be accessible to us in light of actualized circumstances, then what is

³¹ As opposed to tertiary findings such as the ascription of books, dating of historical events, etc., which rarely have any direct bearing on orthodoxy.

³² Where does Allah AlMighty even hint that we need the help of non-Muslims to better study our faith in order to access relevant religious truths that are otherwise beyond our reach?

³³ Whether or not Dr. Qadhi intended it, **it later dawned on me that his asking of these rhetorical questions served to undermine the confidence we might place in certain orthodoxies**. That our aqīda, fiqh, impression of the Sahabah, etc. are all matters of chance, and if certain events transpired even marginally differently, we could have ended up either adhering to different theological madhabs or that our current madhab would have drastically been different.

³⁴ Which Dr. Qadhi was a part of and still looks up to.

³⁵ We could certainly subject this hypothetical to the religion of Islam itself. We could ask, hypothetically, of course, for example, “What would have Islam been like today if certain Caliphs made particular political decisions?” One could even apply such thought experiments to the Qur’an itself by taking note of the science of *asbāb an-nuzūl* and then rhetorically asking, “What would the Qur’an have looked like if the events during the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not unfold the way they did?” But once again, what is the point in asking all these questions?

the benefit in posing such questions? Why concern ourselves with counterfactual outcomes when we live in the moment and must work toward attaining the truth in light of everything that *has*—and *not could have*—occurred?

Yes, if *ʿItizāl* never emerged, our creedal statements would most likely neither have looked identical to what they are today,³⁶ nor would we have explicitly affirmed belief in notions which we otherwise would have had no need to;³⁷ nevertheless, I fail to see how we would have believed in things *contrary* to what we adopt today as long as we believe that Allah protected the religion expressed and practiced by the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions, and ensured that at least a group of upright scholars are guided to adopt a methodology which enables them to access that transmitted truth.³⁸

In summary, I believe Dr. Qadhi’s rhetorical questions here are problematic as they only serve to unnecessarily make us doubt in Islamic orthodoxy and scholarship.

Dr. Qadhi’s Muddled Stance on Orthodoxy

In this section, I will be highlighting Dr. Qadhi’s confusion regarding what qualifies as sound theology focusing particularly on his stance towards Ash‘arīsm. What I intend to do is first relay Dr. Qadhi’s remarks concerning Ash‘arīsm, which will then be followed up by a statement of his which cannot be in any *sensible* manner reconcilable with his stance.

Let us start with the following stances of and statements made by Dr. Qadhi regarding Ash‘arīsm:

- “Atharism pre-dates actual developed Ash‘arīsm by at least a hundred years.”³⁹
- Before Abul Hasan al-Ash‘arī steps onto the scene in Baghdad, there were no famous proto-Ash‘arīs around.⁴⁰ In fact, there was neither Kalām, **nor were there proto-Ash‘arīs around, period,**⁴¹ during the time of somebody

³⁶ Since a significant part of them is influenced by the need to respond to the emergence of opposing heterodox views.

³⁷ For example, there would never have been a reason for a Sunni to *consciously* affirm and believe that the Qur’an is uncreated if it were not for deviant views arising and making assertions to the contrary.

³⁸ Thus, just because a Sunni might not have ever *consciously* affirmed particular views if the Mu‘tazilites never came on to the scene, that in no way implies that a Sunni would have consciously adopted *contrary* views such as the creation of the Qur’an for instance.

³⁹ Class 3, 55:00-55:06

⁴⁰ Class 3, 1:08:30-1:08:55.

⁴¹ In other words, Dr. Qadhi is claiming that there absolutely did not exist any scholar during the time of al-Bukhārī who could even be considered a proto-Ash‘arī (i.e. somebody who lived prior to Ash‘arīsm’s formal inception who still conceptually agreed with at least some of the fundamental tenets of their theology).

like al-Bukhārī where there were only Sunnis, proto-Ḥanbalīs and Mu‘tazilites.⁴²

- The earliest developed Sunni creed is Atharism.
- Ibn Taymiyyah **“demolishes completely” Imam ar-Rāzī’s theology.**⁴³
- “Tafwīd is a doctrine that first appears around maybe 500 A.H.”⁴⁴
- Ibn Taymiyyah, to a large extent, **succeeded in proving that “Ash‘arī theology was not mainstream Sunnism” and that “Ash‘arīsm is a deviancy.”**⁴⁵
- **That the Ash‘arī doctrine on causality is “one of the most bizarre claims of the Ash‘arī theologians that the average Muslim will never even come across till they are spoon-fed and taught Ash‘arī theology; otherwise, it goes against nature.”**⁴⁶

Note what Dr. Qadhi said. He described Ash‘arīsm as:

- Coming much after Atharism
- Being **completely demolished** by Ibn Taymiyyah.
- As being shown **not to be mainstream Sunnism** by Ibn Taymiyyah.
- As being **proven to be a deviancy** by Ibn Taymiyyah.
- As propagating a doctrine on causality **that is bizarre** and something which no average Muslim would adopt as a belief on his own.

⁴² Class 4, 45:45- 46:10. What is confusing is that Dr. Qadhi elsewhere, as we shall discuss later in the article, does argue that Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, who was contemporary to al-Bukhārī, was a proto-Ash‘arī. This is only one of the number of times Dr. Qadhi contradicts himself.

⁴³ Class 4, 58:00. It is important to note that ar-Rāzī ultimately shaped and crystallized Ash‘arī theology up until our time today.

⁴⁴ Class 4, 1:24:00. Dr. Qadhi proceeds on to criticize tafwīd conceptually. Tafwīd, according to Dr. Qadhi here literally entails having absolutely no idea whatsoever what the word in question means. He deems this stance to be nonsensical. However, Dr. Qadhi elsewhere appears to be open to another definition of tafwīd whereby it only entails not diving deeper into the meaning of words, but not to the extent where one’s mind “goes blank” and has absolutely no idea what it means at all. He suggests that 99% of people make tafwīd in this sense when it comes to Allah’s attributes and even affirms that this is where his own personal sympathies lie (Class 9, 55:55-57:26). He even contrasts this stance with what Atharis and Ash‘arīs do since they (according to Dr. Qadhi) dive into these words’ meaning. However, Dr. Qadhi appears to contradict himself elsewhere when he says that “much of Athari Islam is intuitive” and as a result, most people would hold Athari beliefs (Class 12, 1:50:00 onward). It is technically possible that Dr. Qadhi thinks that tafwīd is an exception to this rule and is therefore not contradicting himself; however, the notion of tafwīd does greatly influence the stance one adopts on *Ṣifāt*. Thus, it makes one wonder what exactly Dr. Qadhi has in mind when he says “much of Athari Islam is intuitive.”

⁴⁵ Class 9, 1:17:45-1:18:14

⁴⁶ Class 11, 1:22:51-1:23:04

Nevertheless, despite this very critical perspective on Ash‘arī theology, Dr. Qadhi still states:

“Generic Sunnism in all of its manifestations is inshāAllāhu Ta‘āla a good theology. And the differences between these movements are not to the level that will warrant going to the fire of hell. My bias here, which I’m not going to prove per se, but you make your own judgment is the Athari creed. It’s the earliest creed that is developed, and the **Ash‘arī creed** is very soon after that, and the Māturīdīs are very soon after that. And the differences between them are tangible, but not to the level of kicking one outside the fold of the Sunnah.”⁴⁷

This is utterly baffling. How could somebody designate a theology as “good” **while also describing it as “bizarre,” “demolished,” and being proven to be “deviant”**? What message is Dr. Qadhi trying to convey here precisely? If it is a message of open-mindedness, then should he not have been less decisive with his labeling of stances he deems to be valid?⁴⁸

Moreover, what is Dr. Qadhi’s stance on pursuing theological truths? Why would Dr. Qadhi declare a specific theological school to be a **proven deviancy**, only to later legitimize it as valid and “good”? Why would he be comfortable promoting the validity of a school he reckons to be a proven “deviancy”?

Otherwise, if this is merely a case where Dr. Qadhi merely has strong reservations with the Ash‘arī school, yet still renders it valid, then he should have used much less decisive words when describing it and should have spoken about it in the same manner he would have spoken about any of the four juristic madhabs.⁴⁹ Otherwise, his words would only leave his students confused about the boundaries of orthodox theology and the importance of striving to pursue being within them.

⁴⁷ Class 1, 1:45:14-1:45:47

⁴⁸ Dr. Qadhi is most certainly not a salvific pluralist; however, he evidently has not yet figured out how to express himself coherently and consistently on the subject of religious toleration. At times, he comes across as pushing strongly against a view to only later legitimize it. Consider this problematic statement which Dr. Qadhi makes about “ultimate truth” to see the problems associated with how he expresses himself on this subject,

“You know, whatever you want to justify, you would be able to justify, you will see this in any theology, and I don’t say this as a dismissal. The Atharis do it. **The Christians do it.** The Sufis do it. Whatever you want, **you have your methodology that is internally consistent**, and you can convince your own followers and always a few stragglers from outside come in, such is human nature. And that is very problematic because then what is ultimate truth if every single system in its own paradigm seems to be self-subsistently true.” (Class 11, 1:26:14-1:26:45)

How could Dr. Qadhi say that Christians have an internally consistent methodology? They have anything but that!

⁴⁹ Though a Sunni might prefer one of the four fiqhi madhabs, he would not deem the others as being proven to be “deviant” since he considers them all to be valid.

Dr. Qadhi's Stance Toward the Mu'tazilites

Dr. Qadhi says that many of our scholars “demonized” the Mu'tazilites more than they deserved.⁵⁰ He also praises their contributions to Islam and its sciences.⁵¹ Furthermore, Dr. Qadhi asserts that when it comes to the Mu'tazilites, he “believes that the *Ṣifāt* controversy has been exaggerated.”⁵²

Dr. Qadhi goes further on to explain that the reason why people “hated” and “vilified” the Mu'tazilites is because they used to express their doctrines in a “weird” manner, which “sounds blasphemous”⁵³ and so were misunderstood as a result. And since people attack what they do not understand, the Mu'tazilites pretty much got “hated” on for expressing their beliefs in a manner which made their views incomprehensible to others, **including the “Sunni theologian” who merely had a “gut reaction”**⁵⁴ to what the Mu'tazilites had said.⁵⁵

Though it is undoubtedly correct to suggest that at least some Sunnis misunderstood the Mu'tazilites, it is unfortunate that Dr. Qadhi exaggerated this phenomenon to the point of making it sound like the “Sunni theologian” was too inept to grasp what they were saying. How could one suggest that somebody like Imam Aḥmad and others who heavily engaged the Mu'tazilites in debate failed to effectively comprehend their beliefs? Even if one attempted to argue that theologians such as Imam Aḥmad were not skilled in the art of kalām and were incapable of relating to the jargon used by the Mu'tazilites, it is still crystal clear that the final conclusions reached by the Mu'tazilites (e.g. creation of the Qur'an, etc.) were understood. And regardless of how the Mu'tazilites may have reached their conclusions, they were still to be condemned for the conclusions which they ultimately reached.

It would be best to sum up Dr. Qadhi's stance on the Mu'tazilites and his general attitude toward the *Ṣifāt* disputes which Sunni theologians had with them, by quoting his own words:

“People are very passionate to this day and they're willing to excommunicate you from their strand of Islam **over these abstract issues** and there's very little tangible result. We find iman and taqwa in all of these movements **from the Mu'tazila** to the Karrāmīyyah to the Ashā'irah to the Atharis. We find genuine love of Allah and His Messenger. And it's a very difficult conclusion to come to. And I know it irritates a lot of people and

⁵⁰ Class 2, 46:52-47:00

⁵¹ Class 2, 1:20:45 onward; and 1:23:10 onward; and 1:33:00 onward. I believe Dr. Qadhi is on point when he says we should acknowledge the contributions of the Mu'tazilites and that they were, just as all sects, victims of being misrepresented.

⁵² Class 2, 1:33:40

⁵³ Dr. Qadhi, to his credit, justifies how people could perceive the Mu'tazilite's language as such and makes it clear that he does not defend how the Mu'tazilites expressed themselves.

⁵⁴ As opposed to Sunni theologians having a well-thought-out and composed reaction!

⁵⁵ Class 2, 1:39:20-1:41:20

they find it very problematic when I say this and I find it problematic because I spent ten years of my life defending it. **But, so what? In the end of the day it's language. It's language.**"⁵⁶

Thus, according to Dr. Qadhi, these *Ṣifāt* disputes are merely “abstract issues” that do not produce any “tangible result,” as they all supposedly boil down to expressing ourselves differently. Moreover, Dr. Qadhi implores us to remember that the Mu‘tazilites love Allah and His Messenger.

Dr. Qadhi also said:

“Chomsky has done amazing work in language and the reality of language, and in my humble opinion, I wish I had the time, I do have the interest. In my humble opinion, we need a modern Muslim theologian to master what we know about languages and words and phrases and how words relate to reality, and then go back to the *Ṣifāt* controversy and calm everybody down. Because, I'll jump the gun here, and I'll say and I'll hope nobody takes this out of context, and again, has another issue about me, but if you really look at it, **perhaps this entire debate about the *Ṣifāt*, especially between the Mu‘tazila and the Sunnis, much less between the Ash‘arīs and the Atharis was hugely, hugely, hugely exaggerated. Way beyond what it needed to.** And if people simply understood the reality of language, and that in reality, these madhabs of ‘aḳīdah are actually in their own ways differing about the reality of language more than they are about the reality of the divine, it would actually help calm people down.”⁵⁷

It is difficult to understand how Dr. Qadhi could be so simplistic by engaging in such reductionism. “Language” issues are merely a single element factored into the theological disputes, while the primary points of contention relate more to epistemological clashes pertaining to the reliability of conclusions deduced via philosophical theology (i.e. *kalām*) and its authority as an epistemic tool in determining the interpretation of the Qur‘an and aḥādīth.

Hence, when Mu‘tazilites provide philosophical arguments in their efforts to demonstrate why God must be timeless and changeless and argue that as a result of this, all *nuṣūṣ* of the Qur‘an and aḥādīth regarding the *Ṣifāt* which apparently imply that Allah acts temporally must be reinterpreted, how could this be said to be a “language” issue?⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Class 12, 3:59:52-4:00:29

⁵⁷ Class 2, 52:33-53:37

⁵⁸ The same goes for all the theological differences, be it the foundation of morality, predestination, the epistemic status of āḥād aḥādīth, etc. Earlier, Dr. Qadhi remarked that the Mu‘tazilites “didn’t concern themselves with hadith” (Class 2, 09:08). Clearly, this has nothing to do with “language issues” as well. So, even if we grant Dr. Qadhi’s claim for the sake of argument that *Ṣifāt* debates primarily revolve around language barriers, there are still plenty of other theological stances which the Mu‘tazilites adopted which would warrant condemning them and excommunicating them outside the circle of Islamic orthodoxy.

Regarding such discussions not having any “tangible results,” it is not entirely clear what Dr. Qadhi is alluding to and what constitutes being a “tangible result” according to him. Keeping “results,” aside, let us ask whether there are “tangible” *benefits* in having such discussions to begin with.⁵⁹ Is there a tangible benefit in striving to perfect one’s epistemology by accurately balancing between the epistemic authority of divine revelation and reason? Is there a tangible benefit in aspiring toward a robust, accurate, and consistent theological paradigm that is loyally submissive to divine revelation? Absolutely! Well, these are some of the real foundational issues pressing many Islamic theologians to discuss doctrinal issues such as the *Ṣifāt* to begin with.

The Atharis, Ash‘arīs, and Māturidis jointly recognized how extremely problematic the views of the Mu‘tazilites related to *Ṣifāt* were for a reason (actually, several), and for Dr. Qadhi to merely brush this aside as some sort of misunderstanding due to language barriers is a highly superficial attempt at scrutinizing these issues which demand greater understanding and in-depth analysis.

Thus, I, in agreement with the bulk of Sunni scholars, cannot find myself accompanying Dr. Qadhi by jumping to the extreme opposite end of the spectrum when he suggests that our disagreements with the Mu‘tazilites on the matter of *Ṣifāt* are not serious.

Dr. Qadhi’s Unsettling Remarks Regarding Imam Aḥmad and His Followers

Dr. Qadhi said:

“Eventually Ibn Ḥanbal began warning publicly warning against al-Muḥāsibī and because Ibn Ḥanbal was the hero of the Miḥna...and of the things that happened is he became the most popular Shaykh of the Muslim world at the time. The hearts were with him. And again, I’m not saying it shouldn’t have been, but there is a human psychological impact **when you love somebody so much that whatever they say, you follow it, and you don’t really think too much about whether they are right or wrong**, that’s just human nature. And Ibn Ḥanbal publicly warned the people from listening to Muḥāsibī, so much so, that Muḥāsibī had to take cover, like some of the followers of Ibn Ḥanbal. Let’s just say, what’s a polite way to say this, they became a little bit enthusiastic and so he began to take precautions. And this shows you subḥānAllāh, it’s sad. It should not have come to this level. **And we love our scholars, but sometimes there’s an element of fanaticism that is found in some strands of Islam that should not be there. And the ‘ulamā’ of that strand should have been the ones to tone their own followers down, but it appears that they did not do so. And that level of intolerance, and that level of strict fanaticism that is found in the followers, truth be told, one cannot absolve completely the**

⁵⁹ To the point of moderation of course.

founders and the movers and the shakers from that intolerance because this is happening in front of them and nothing is done.”⁶⁰

Dr. Qadhi proceeds to say:

“And so in his own lifetime though, Imam Aḥmad publicly began saying: Nobody should attend al-Muḥāsibī. And because Ibn Ḥanbal was so powerful and because he had so much clout, al-Muḥāsibī completely became *persona non grata* in Baghdad. And he went into hiding. There might have been some physical scuffles. There might have been some threats. And so, he went underground. And it is really sad because it should never have gotten to that stage. And no doubt, Ibn Ḥanbal himself, without a doubt did not order anything, but still, it’s coming from one strand. Okay fine, you don’t like the guy, just say: I don’t like the guy, and you have every right to say that. But anyways, this is my two cents, my personal two cents. But, again let’s be honest here. **This strictness, and this, call it intolerance, it shall remain in that strand and it still remains to this day,**⁶¹...but let’s ask ourselves: Is this really what our religion stands for? Is this something that Allah and His Messenger want us to do? **And then I go back always to ‘Alī’s (may Allah be pleased with him) stance towards the Khawārij. And I say: Who is the more Salafī of the two? Ibn Ḥanbal or ‘Alī (may Allah be pleased with him)?** When he said to the Khawārij: Look I tried, I really wanted you. I don’t like what you’re doing. I don’t agree with you. But *laysa lanā ‘alaykum haqq*;⁶² we cannot force you. We can’t stop you from preaching your version and having your way as long as you don’t harm other people. This is ‘Alī bin Abi Talib as the Khalifah. How about somebody⁶³ you know, **who is simply a preacher and a**

⁶⁰ Class 3, 33:10-35:17. Dr. Qadhi also relayed a story that Imam Aḥmad once secretly listened in on one of al-Muḥāsibī’s lessons, and despite getting really emotional and crying as a result of being influenced by what he heard, Imam Aḥmad still warned his followers to stay away from al-Muḥāsibī. Nevertheless, some have cast doubt on this story, such as Imam adh-Dhahabī; see: *Mīzan al-‘Itidāl*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2008, vol. 2, p. 165; and some Western academics agree with him; see: Christopher Melchert, “The Adversaries of Imam Aḥmad”, *Arabica*, Apr., 1997, T. 44, Fasc. 2 (Apr., 1997), p. 244. However, even if the story is authentic, it teaches an inspiring and beautiful lesson: that we should never let our emotions influence our decisions when it comes to doing what we believe to be right.

⁶¹ He is referring to those who follow the aqīdah of Imam Aḥmad, namely Salafis.

⁶² I was unable to find the narration which contains this exact phrase; however, in footnote no. 124 below, I present the narration I think Dr. Qadhi has in mind.

⁶³ He is referring to Imam Aḥmad.

cleric,⁶⁴ and he has no political clout. He simply has the social charisma to enforce a boycott. How about that?”⁶⁵

So Dr. Qadhi is making a few claims here:

- The people, **including the scholars**,⁶⁶ followed Imam Aḥmad because he was a “hero,” and due to “human nature,” **they did not consider whether he was right or wrong in the matters which they followed him on.**⁶⁷
- Imam Aḥmad should not be absolved of the intolerance and fanaticism of some of his followers.
- The ‘intolerance’ of Imam Aḥmad and some of his followers influence Salafism to this day.⁶⁸
- Imam Aḥmad should have been more like ‘Alī (r), who was tolerant of the Kharijites as long as they remained peaceful.⁶⁹

I’m not sure I need to weigh in any further here, as Dr. Qadhi’s words pretty much speak for themselves. All I could say is *Allāhu al-Musta‘ān*, and may He guide us all.

Dr. Qadhi’s Negligence in Giving Proper Direction to His Students

I was concerned about and displeased with some of the things I had observed during this course when it came to the influence Dr. Qadhi tried to exert on his students. Here are a few points I would like to share:

- It became clear to me that several students in the “advanced ‘aqīdah” course were anything but “advanced” students. Dr. Qadhi, in one instance, even

⁶⁴ One who knows Imam Aḥmad and what the scholars across different Sunni theological and juristic madhabs, past and present, deem his stature to be would not be comfortable with such an ungenerous description of him. He was more than a mere preacher and cleric; he was an eminent scholar and Imam whom scholars during his time recognized had exceptional knowledge, insight, and courage. He stood in defense of orthodoxy and did not make his decisions rashly, let alone was given some kind of pass by the remaining bulk of scholars to do so.

⁶⁵ Class 3, 43:45-45:47

⁶⁶ Dr. Qadhi did not make that qualification. It would not make sense for him to do so anyway, for we all know that even the scholars of Ahlus Sunnah rallied behind and supported Imam Aḥmad as well.

⁶⁷ **It is not too reassuring to know that our scholars advocated theological stances without caring about whether they are right or wrong!** Once again, this is a clear-cut example of how Dr. Qadhi denigrates and undermines the credibility of traditional Islamic scholarship. What benefit is there in his remark, “we love our scholars,” yet speaks about them in such a manner?

⁶⁸ I suspect such ‘intolerant’ Salafis would feel more emboldened knowing that they are emulating Imam Aḥmad!

⁶⁹ I will address this fallacious analogy at a later point in the article.

told his students that he doubted that all of them read *al-'aqīdah at-Taḥāwīyyah*, a basic primer in Islamic theology. He also paused at times and asked his students questions to see if they understood the subject matter, and it became quite clear that much of the material was way above their heads.⁷⁰ On occasion, Dr. Qadhi even hinted that some of his students do not even know Arabic.⁷¹ Therefore, I was disappointed to see how such a low bar was set for accepting students into such a course while failing to ensure they were already firmly grounded in orthodox theology and could access the primary sources in the Arabic language.

- I was upset to see how Dr. Tamara Gray was brought in to teach a class on Sufism and defended [Ibn 'Arabī](#) as a “Sunni” who was “misunderstood.”⁷² She also made sympathetic remarks regarding [al-Hallāj](#). One could even see the negative impact her class had on one of the students who gave a very sympathetic presentation on al-Hallāj.⁷³ To Dr. Qadhi’s credit, he did try to weigh in and express his reservations about such a stance, but as the ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ academic he is trying to portray himself to be, he could only push his views so far.
- I found myself concerned with Dr. Qadhi’s encouragement to the students (which includes those who are unqualified and cannot read Arabic) to “become independent” in being critical in their assessment of theological schools.⁷⁴ This might have been okay if Dr. Qadhi provided the right necessary intellectual tools to his students, but for Dr. Qadhi to have given this advice to students after undermining the scholarly objectivity of traditional Muslim scholars and propping up the academic stature and credibility of non-Muslim academics sounded only like a recipe for disaster.
- Perhaps the most serious concern I had was when Dr. Qadhi in the first segment of Class 5 spent a considerable amount of time casting doubts on the reliability of traditional Islamic scholars⁷⁵ and accused them of “sanitizing,” “coloring,” “romanticizing,” etc. history. Dr Qadhi also told his students that as a result of his research, he has many findings which he would not share with them “because it’s not safe” to do so.⁷⁶ He also said

⁷⁰ This can be observed in the “recap” segment of Class 11.

⁷¹ He would say something like (paraphrased), “For those of you who cannot read Arabic, you can read this book.”

⁷² Class 8

⁷³ Class 12. It is entirely possible that this student already had such sympathies before registering for the course, however before presenting his paper, the student remarked that it was the class with Dr. Tamara Gray which motivated him into researching the subject. (Class 12, 2:39:00 onward).

⁷⁴ Class 13, 6:40:30-6:41:40

⁷⁵ He repeated the claim that they would cherry-pick from and “sanitize” history and even give biased interpretations of certain events, etc.

⁷⁶ One could only wonder what benefit he thought there was in telling them this.

that he draws “red lines” which he personally does not cross in order to preserve his own orthodoxy.⁷⁷ I found this all to be completely unacceptable. Dr. Qadhi literally exposed his students to intellectual doubts and even told them that he possessed “dangerous” findings that he would not share with them. He also carelessly undermined the only credible source that could possibly address these doubts, namely orthodox Islamic scholarship itself. Then he thinks he could make things right by expressing how he [selectively and subjectively] draws orthodox “red lines” for himself even when there is no convincing reason left for people to emulate him in his “red line” drawing.⁷⁸ I found this to be utterly careless and irresponsible on Dr. Qadhi’s part.

In summary, I found this to be the course’s biggest blight, and this reason alone suffices for me to strongly discourage others from registering for it if Dr. Qadhi intends to repeat what he did.⁷⁹

Peripheral Issues:

Dr. Qadhi’s Fixation on and Misuse of Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī

In the first 30 minutes of Class 3, Dr. Qadhi speaks a lot about Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243 A.H.). He contends that he is the “true primogenitor” of Ash‘arīsm. He deems him to be a “proto-Ghazālī figure” of sorts. Dr. Qadhi recognizes that even though Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī did not adopt all the soon-to-be Asha‘rī stances on the *Ṣifāt*,⁸⁰ he still argues that al-Muḥāsibī adopted enough stances which would still warrant his claim that he is the “true primogenitor” of Ash‘arīsm. He especially focused on a phrase which al-Muḥāsibī remarked in his book *Al-‘Aql wa-Fahmul Qur’ān* whereby al-Muḥāsibī said:

“Allah the Almighty spoke with a Speech from His Nafs (*taklīman min Nafsihi*) from above His Throne, from above His seven heavens.”⁸¹

⁷⁷ According to Dr. Qadhi, he basically takes off his ‘academic’ and ‘critical’ hat and brings in Islamic theology to make sense of problematic historical events. This would not have been a problem if Dr. Qadhi was not so selective and arbitrary when he decides when to behave like a traditional Muslim and Western-influenced skeptic.

⁷⁸ One should particularly listen to Class 5, 24:15-27:00; however, the entire first 27 minutes of Class 5 should be listened to in order to appreciate and recognize the gist of everything that has been mentioned here. There are other problematic remarks which he made which concern lending sympathies to how Shias interpret certain historical events in opposition to Sunnism; nevertheless, for the sake of not making this article lengthier than it already is, I will not dive into this and other issues.

⁷⁹ The spiritual impact that the adoption of this inconsistent and confused skeptical approach could have on people could take years to manifest as time and experience will eventually make clear to the individual who utilizes such a methodology just how diametrically opposed Islamic orthodoxy is to such distorted methods of rational inquiry.

⁸⁰ For example, Al-Muḥāsibī affirmed literal ‘Ulūw for Allah just as Atharis do.

⁸¹ Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *Al-‘Aql wa-Fahmul Qur’ān*, 1971, ed. Hussain al-Qutlī, p. 247

Dr. Qadhi concentrates on the bit I transliterated. He contends, among other things, that Al-Muḥāsibī over here is espousing the Ash‘arī belief that Allah does not speak in sounds.⁸² However, is that what al-Muḥāsibī is actually saying?

The early Sufi Abu Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 380 A.H.) claims that al-Muḥāsibī was amongst those Sufis who did, in fact, believe that Allah spoke in letters and sounds. He also clarified that al-Muḥāsibī believed that speech could only be known this way and that the letters and sounds of the Qur‘an are uncreated and subsist in Allah’s essence.⁸³ Even Western academics such as Dr. Josef van Ess argue that al-Muḥāsibī disagreed with Ibn Kullāb’s stance on Allah’s Speech, as he was closer to the theology of Imam Aḥmad in this regard; namely, that Allah speaks in letters and sounds.⁸⁴

But to avoid appealing to authorities, let us go back to Dr. Qadhi’s argument. Does that statement show that al-Muḥāsibī believed that Allah does not speak in sounds? I do not believe so. Let us consider the following:

- We need to be wary of retrojection and avoid projecting notions which arose later back into the earlier statements of scholars simply because they may have uttered phrases that appear similar.
- Nowhere in his book, *Al-‘Aql wa-Fahmul Qur‘ān*, does al-Muḥāsibī distinguish between Allah’s *Kalam Nafsī* (even conceptually, not just terminologically) and letters and sounds. In fact, throughout his entire book, one sees al-Muḥāsibī insinuating to the contrary, whereby he affirms that the speech of Allah is in Arabic and spoken by Him.⁸⁵
- One of al-Muḥāsibī’s objectives in the book is to refute the Mu‘tazilite stance on the creation of the Qur‘an. In light of that, we should have at least expected him to be explicit about the letters and sounds being created and distinguished them from the actual *Kalam Nafsī* of Allah in such a context. The absence of such an explicit clarification suggests that he did not adopt this stance.⁸⁶
- The point al-Muḥāsibī was trying to make when he said, *taklīman min nafsihī*, is that Allah **actually spoke the Qur‘an Himself** and this speech was manifested “from Him” or “from His Self,” as opposed to the Mu‘tazilite stance, which states that He created the Qur‘an separate from Himself. We see al-Muḥāsibī expressing this same point differently when

⁸² Class 3, 22:35-22:38. Ash‘arīs also believed that Allah does not speak in letters; however, I was unable to determine whether Dr. Qadhi attributes this belief to al-Muḥāsibī as well.

⁸³ See: Muḥammad ibn Abī Ishāq al-Kalābādhī, *at-Ta‘arruf li-Madhab Ahlil Taṣawwuf*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, ed. Aḥmad Shamsuddīn, 2011), pp. 42-43

⁸⁴ Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*, vol. 4, pp. 231-232

⁸⁵ See for example: Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *Al-‘Aql wa-Fahmul Qur‘ān*, 1971, ed. Hussain al-Qutlī, pp. 308-309

⁸⁶ At the very least during the time he authored this book.

he says, “Then He uttered this speech via His essence” (*thumma takallama bi-dhālika taklīman bi-dhātihi*);⁸⁷ and, “He spoke it with his Nafs” (*takallama bihi bi-Nafsihi*).⁸⁸ Thus, it becomes quite clear what al-Muḥāsibī is really trying to say here. He is trying to express the view that the Qu’ran **was truly spoken by Allah Himself**; that is all. To derive anything more from this requires evidence on the part of the one who wishes to do so.⁸⁹

- Finally, if we factor into consideration what al-Kalābādhī said regarding al-Muḥāsibī believing that the letters and sounds of the Qur’an are uncreated and subsist in Allah’s essence, then the phrase which Dr. Qadhi appeals to could easily be understood in light of that. **In other words, even if al-Muḥāsibī adopted some notion of *Kalam Nafsi*, he still believed that uncreated letters and sounds are a part of it.**

None of this is to suggest that al-Muḥāsibī was not affected by at least some of the *kalāmī* notions circulating during his time, particularly by the Mu’tazilites and Ibn Kullāb; however, we need to be more precise about what we ascribe to him. Nevertheless, it appears that Dr. Qadhi, in his determination to portray al-Muḥāsibī as a proto-Ash‘arī, mistakenly retrojected the later Ash‘arī notion of *Kalam Nafsi* into al-Muḥāsibī’s words based on an argument that is wanting. My concern is more to do with Dr. Qadhi’s specific argument than his conclusion per se.

Dr. Qadhi says that al-Muḥāsibī’s negation of temporality to and [accidents](#) in Allah (*lā yaḥduthu bihi al-ḥawādith*)⁹⁰ was done so utilizing particular phraseology which ended up being “purely Ash‘arī.”⁹¹ But once again, it appears that Dr. Qadhi is making a mountain out of a molehill here. The relevant point remains that this notion was propagated by others and was not unique to al-Muḥāsibī.⁹² There is nothing “purely Ash‘arī” about this belief

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 309

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 265

⁸⁹ Even Ḥanbalī scholars use similar phraseology to describe Imam Aḥmad’s beliefs that Allah’s Speech subsists in Him (*yaqūmu bihi*); see for example: Ibn an-Najjār, *Sharḥ Kawkab al-Munīr*, (Riyadh: Obeikan, ed. Az-Zuhayli & Hamad), vol. 2, p. 103. Similarly, Ibn Taymiyyah uses such phraseology when he describes the Salaf’s stance as believing that Allah does speak with a speech subsisting in His essence (*kalāman qā’iman bi-dhātihi*) and speech subsisting in His Nafs (*kalāman qā’iman bi-nafs Allah*); see: Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Obeikan, ed. Al-Jazzār & Al-Bāz), vol.3, p. 474 & vol. 6, p. 455 respectively. And obviously, as is well known, neither Imam Aḥmad, nor Ibn Taymiyyah adopted any notion of *Kalāmī Nafsi*!

⁹⁰ Ibn Taymiyyah mentions that some have stated that al-Muḥāsibī retracted from this position; see Ibn Taymiyyah, *Dar’ Ta’arūḍ al-‘Aql wal-Naql*, (Riyadh: 2nd edition, ed. M.R. Sālim, 1991), vol. 7, pp. 148-149.

⁹¹ Class 3, 22:50

⁹² Ironically, Dr. Qadhi himself in his Masters dissertation argued that it was the Mu’tazilites who first adopted this position and consequently influenced the other *kalāmī* groups to use it; see: Yasir Qadhi, *Maqālāt al-Jahm bin Ṣafwān wa-Atharūha fil-Firaq al-Islāmīyyah*, (Riyadh: Dār Aḍwā’ as-Salaf, 2005), p. 352

*conceptually and theologically.*⁹³ That is the point; phraseology is a side issue even if we were to grant Dr. Qadhi's point here.

Dr. Qadhi, however, believes that this is all significant because al-Muḥāsibī is allegedly “the first Sunni Mutakallim” to express these ideas,⁹⁴ and as a result, this warrants that his views earn some legitimacy. But, why is that so significant? Cannot Sunnis commit *invalid* errors? I am not insinuating that al-Muḥāsibī was a full out deviant person or anything of the sort, but I am scratching my head trying to make sense out of Dr. Qadhi's peculiar deductive reasoning in terms of how he infers sound theological stances.

Dr. Qadhi's Parroting of a Historical Error

Dr. Qadhi said that prior to the fitnah of Ibn al-Qushayrī (469 A.H.) for 100-150 years, the Ḥanbalīs and Ash'arīs were “kind of getting along” and that they were “kind of strands of the same school.”⁹⁵ He said that before the fitnah, “the early Ash'arīs and early Ḥanbalīs did not view each other as being opponents.”⁹⁶ Dr. Qadhi even attributed this stance to Ibn Taymiyyah.⁹⁷ He blames this incident for having a “ripple effect” up until our time today, where “hardcore fanatics” from both sides⁹⁸ “delegitimize” the other.⁹⁹

The fitnah of Ibn al-Qushayrī unquestionably sharpened the divide between the Ḥanbalīs and Ash'arīs and exacerbated the tensions, but is it true, as Dr. Qadhi said, that the Ash'arīs and Ḥanbalīs were “kind of getting along” and were “kind of strands of the same school”? Far from it. We could know this by simply looking at two things: 1) What Ḥanbalī and

⁹³ Dr. Qadhi contends that al-Muḥāsibī “laid the foundations” for the Ash'arīs to come later and further develop their theology. His case for demonstrating this has been wanting, for much ink has been spilled demonstrating that the Ash'arīs have been influenced by other actors, such as the Mu'tazilites and Ibn Kullāb, and these arguments are yet to be sufficiently tackled by Dr. Qadhi. Moreover, even if al-Muḥāsibī did influence the Ash'arīs, who influenced al-Muḥāsibī himself when his very ideas were not even unique?

⁹⁴ Class 3, 28:38

⁹⁵ Part 4, 20:30-21:30. However, Dr. Qadhi appears to contradict what he said earlier in Class 1, 1:46:43-1:46:58, when he said, “And even the early Ash'arīs and Ḥanbalīs did not consider themselves to be different from one another up until around 370-380 hijrah. 400 hijrah is when the split really began.” Over here, Dr. Qadhi is dating the split to 70-100 years before the fitnah of Ibn al-Qushayrī! So which is it then?!

⁹⁶ Part 4, 1:08:45

⁹⁷ This is not a precise reflection of Ibn Taymiyyah's stance. See: Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, (Dārul Kutb al-'Ilmiyyah, ed. Muṣṭafā 'Abdul Qādir 'Atā), vol. 2, pp. 12-13. However, Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571 A.H.) in his book *Tabyīn Kadhib al-Mufṭarī* did commit a gross historical error which Dr. Qadhi appears to be uncritically regurgitating, which is that the Ḥanbalīs and Ash'arīs were undivided before the fitnah of Ibn al-Qushayrī.

⁹⁸ He is referring to Salafis and Ash'arīs today.

⁹⁹ What Dr. Qadhi fails to inform his students is that the bulk of scholars in each camp is the one held by these supposed “hardcore fanatics” who do not deem the opposing school as unconditionally valid. Dr Qadhi gave a misleading impression that this is somehow a fringe or minority opinion in each camp's side. He repeats this claim in Class 1, 1:45:45. However, this is an observably factually false statement. It is surprising that Dr. Qadhi would make such a demonstrably false remark, as it is known to virtually every Salafi and Asha'rī that most of their classical and contemporary scholars do not deem the other group to be *entirely* legitimate as a valid theological school falling under the umbrella of orthodoxy.

Ash‘arī scholars before the fitnah of Ibn al-Qushayrī said regarding each other, and 2) What historians documented in terms of clashes between the two groups prior to the fitnah.

Regarding the first point, here are a few examples:

- Ibn Mandah (d. 395 A.H.) declared the Ash‘arīs to be heretics (*zanādiqah*).¹⁰⁰
- Qāḍī Abu Ya‘lá (d. 458 A.H.) said that innovators should be boycotted and included the Ash‘arīs as being amongst them.¹⁰¹
- Ibn al-Bannā’ (d. 471 A.H.) distinguished between Ahlus Sunnah and the followers of al-Ash‘arī.¹⁰²
- Abu Ismā‘īl al-Harawī (d. 481 A.H.) cites several scholars before the fitnah of Ibn al-Qushayrī who cursed and made harsh declarations against the Ash‘arīs¹⁰³ such as them being heretics, their slaughter not being permitted to consume, etc.¹⁰⁴

I could provide several other examples, especially from scholars who were Ḥanbalī in ‘aqīdah (i.e. Atharism), but followed the fiqh of other madhabs. However, the above suffices for making the intended point.

Regarding the second point, let us take a look at a few examples of clashes and incidents which took place between the two groups which took place prior to the fitnah of Ibn al-Qushayrī:¹⁰⁵

- Qāḍī Abu Ya‘lá authored his book *Ibtāl at-Ta‘wīlāt li-Akhhbār as-Ṣifāt* in response to the Ash‘arī scholar Ibn Fūrak. After he did so, the Ash‘arīs in the year 429 A.H., accused him of anthropomorphism.¹⁰⁶ Three years later, in 432 A.H., the problem resurfaced, and it required the intervention of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliph Al-Qā‘im bi-Amrillah who

¹⁰⁰ He did so twice in his *Ar-Radd ‘alá Az-Zanādiqa*. One can either read it over [here](#) or [here](#) in manuscript form.

¹⁰¹ His son, Ibn Abī Ya‘lá (d. 526 A.H.) attributed this stance to him in his book *Al-‘Itiqād*, (Riyadh: Dār al-Atlas, 2002, ed. Al-Khamīs), pp. 43-47.

¹⁰² George Makdisi, “Autograph Diary of an Eleventh-Century Historian of Baghdād—III,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, 1956, vol. 18, no. 2 (1956), point no. 57. We know this statement was uttered before the fitnah of Ibn al-Qushayrī since the diary’s last recorded date was in 461 A.H.; see Makdisi’s “Autograph Diary of an Eleventh-Century Historian of Baghdād—V” and see point no. 168 and then 172 onward to confirm this point.

¹⁰³ Sometimes referred to as the Kullābīyyah.

¹⁰⁴ Abu Ismā‘īl al-Harawī, *Dhamm al-Kalām wa-Ahlihi*, (Madinah: Maktabat al-Ghurabā’ al-Athariyyah, 1998, ed. Al-Anṣārī), vol. 4, pp. 404-405, 408-409, 411, 413, 419-220

¹⁰⁵ Most of the examples I will be providing here are taken from Dr. Khālid Kabīr ‘Alāl’s books *Al-Azma al-‘Aqīdiyyah Bayn al-Ash‘ariyyah wa-Ahlul Hadīth* and *al-Harakah al-‘Ilmiyyah al-Ḥanbalīyyah wa-Atharuha fī al-Mashriq al-Islāmī*. Still, I made sure to check the primary sources myself to ensure accuracy.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fīl Tārīkh*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2009), vol. 8, p. 21

eventually sided with Abu Ya‘lá, which ultimately spawned the drafting and enacting of the Qādirī Creed.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, some years later, in 445 A.H., tension reignited once again, and things had to be patched up.¹⁰⁸

- Two years later, in 447 A.H., an incident broke out between the Ḥanbalīs and Ash‘arīs, who were Shaf‘īs in fiqh, when the Ḥanbalīs raised some objections over a number of juristic issues. This escalated to the point where violence broke out, and the Ash‘arīs had to confine themselves to their homes and miss congregational and Friday prayers out of fear of the Ḥanbalīs.¹⁰⁹ Though what may have sparked this specific incident is not directly attributable to theological dissension, it is very reasonable to presume that things only escalated to the point of violence the way they did because of the theological tension that was already built up by that point.¹¹⁰
- From 445 A.H. until 455 A.H., Tughril Beg instituted a policy based on the precepts of the Qādirī Creed, which saw that the Ash‘arīs would be cursed from the pulpits while the Ḥanbalīs just sat back and watched.¹¹¹
- In 461 A.H., Ibn al-Bannā’ (d. 471 A.H.) mentioned an incident which took place in a masjid where an Ash‘arī preacher began disparaging Ḥanbalīs and preaching the superiority of Imam al-Ash‘arī. He had to be removed from the pulpit twice.¹¹²

Moreover, what is peculiar is that Dr. Qadhi himself in the course spoke about how negatively Imam Aḥmad treated al-Muḥāsibī and how Imam Abul Hasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324 A.H.) was struggling to attain the approval of the Ḥanbalīs during the time of al-Barbahārī.¹¹³ Thus, it is odd for Dr. Qadhi to acknowledge these things while concurrently

¹⁰⁷ Qāḍī Abu Ya‘lá, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, ed. Bahjat & Ibn Hasan), vol. 2, p. 169

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 170

¹⁰⁹ Ibnul Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓam*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1995, 2nd edition), vol. 15, p. 347; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fīl Tārīkh*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2009), vol. 8, p. 93; Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wal-Nihāyah*, (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif, 1991), vol. 12, p. 66

¹¹⁰ It also explains why historians such as Ibnul Jawzī and Ibn Kathīr used the “Ash‘arī” label instead of the juristically-connotative “Shaf‘ī” one when referring to this incident.

¹¹¹ See: George Makdisi, 1973, “The Sunni Revival,” In: *Islamic civilisation, 950-1150*, ed. D.H. Richards, p. 157

¹¹² George Makdisi, “Autograph Diary of an Eleventh-Century Historian of Baghdād—III,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, 1956, vol. 18, no. 2 (1956), point no. 57

¹¹³ Al-Ash‘arī had to seek refuge in somebody’s house out of fear of getting killed; see: Ibnul Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓam*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1995, 2nd edition), vol. 14, p. 29

trying to downplay the seriousness of the tensions between the Ḥanbalīs and Ash‘arīs before the fitnah of Ibn al-Qushayrī.

Dr. Qadhi on Whether “Salafism” Is “One Thing”

Dr. Qadhi said that one objective of his is to “shatter the myth that Salafism was one thing.”¹¹⁴ How did he attempt to fulfil that? Well, Dr. Qadhi attempted a few things, such as:

- Demonstrating that several early Ḥanbalī scholars passionately believed that Allah will seat the Prophet (peace be upon him) next to Him on the Throne, yet, this is not widely-held by Salafis today. This proves that theological stances have shifted.
- Pointing to examples of Ḥanbalī scholars who held divergent theological opinions such as Qāḍī Abu Ya‘lá, Ibnul Jawzī, Ibn ‘Aqīl, etc. Dr. Qadhi further argued that some of them represented their “own strands” of Ḥanbalīsm.
- Asserting that Ibn Taymiyyah came along later with his strand to become the dominant Athari strand up until our present time, while the previous strands of Atharism died out.

Once again, I find myself struggling to relate to Dr. Qadhi’s line of reasoning.

What is meant by “one thing?” Does “one thing” to him necessitate that every single individual adherent to a group be absolutely identical to his co-madhabist in every single aspect? If yes, then which prominent Salafī ever claimed that Salafism is “one thing” in that sense and never acknowledged differences of opinion within the school?

It is essential to point out that what qualifies one to be outside the fold of a particular school is when that individual violates the **foundational principles and maxims of that school**. If one holds a mistaken opinion, even on a theological point, because *he mistakenly applied, yet did not willfully forsake*, those principles, then his co-madhabists would still not necessarily deem him as having abandoned the school itself.¹¹⁵ This is why, for example, Ibn Khuzaymah was not considered to be outside the fold of Ahlus Sunnah by his co-madhabists simply because he made ta’wīl of the ḥadīth of Adam (peace be upon him) being created in Allah’s image.¹¹⁶

Thus, Dr. Qadhi is mistaken to inflate the difference between Atharis who affirmed and those who negated whether the Prophet (peace be upon him) would be seated on the

¹¹⁴ Class 9, 40:30

¹¹⁵ See: Imam ash-Shāṭibī, *Al-‘Itiṣām*, (Dār ibn ‘Affān, ed. Al-Hilālī, 1993), vol. 2, pp. 712-713; and Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhāj as-Sunnah*, (ed. Muḥammad Rāshid Sālim, 1986), vol. 2, p. 221

¹¹⁶ See: Imam adh-Dhahabī, *Siyar ‘Alām an-Nubalā’*, (Al-Risāla, 1983), vol. 14, pp. 374-377

Throne, as one's stance on this particular question does not determine his ascription to a particular theological school.

As for Ḥanbalī **jurists** who held divergent theological stances,¹¹⁷ this, in reality, has no bearing on the fact that the overwhelming stances of the Ḥanbalī **theological school have** remained virtually uniform in terms of its foundational principles.¹¹⁸ Even Dr. Qadhi himself admits that the “core doctrines” of Salafis go back to Imam Aḥmad himself “**very clearly;**”¹¹⁹ thus, why then should Salafis be too concerned about those who came after Imam Aḥmad¹²⁰ and believe that they misrepresent him?¹²¹

Dr. Qadhi's Faulty Analogy of 'Alī's (r) Attitude Toward the Kharijites

Dr. Qadhi alluded to the famous stance of 'Alī (r) regarding the Kharijites whereby he allowed them to coexist peacefully on the condition that they do not fight and remain peaceful. Then Dr. Qadhi says:

“When they¹²² refused to come to his¹²³ side, what did he famously remark? He said: ‘Okay, you have chosen your way. We have no right to force you to come back to us, and as long as you don't harm other Muslims, we will not harm you.’¹²⁴ Now that is truly, truly, an exemplary attitude, and one

¹¹⁷ Dr. Khālid Kabīr 'Alāl lists the names of Ḥanbalī scholars who got influenced by Ash'arism, Mu'tazilism, philosophy, Shī'ism, etc. in his book, *al-Harakah al-'Ilmīyyah al-Ḥanbalīyyah wa-Atharuha fi al-Mashriq al-Islāmī*, p. 531 onward.

¹¹⁸ This is something recognized by both traditional Muslim scholars and non-Muslim academics alike. See: Nimrod Hurvitz, *The Formation of Ḥanbalism: Piety into Power*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002, p. 157; Binyamin Abrahamov, “Scripturalist and Traditionalist Theology,” In: *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Schmidtke, 2016, p. 18; and Saud al-Sarhan, “The Creeds of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal,” In: *Books and Bibliophiles: Studies in honour of Paul Auchterlonie on the Bio-Bibliography of the Muslim World*, ed. Robert Gleave, 2014, pp. 31-32

¹¹⁹ Class 3, 55:50-56:00

¹²⁰ Even Ash'arīs, to this day, claim to represent the theology championed by Imam Aḥmad; thus, Salafis are cognizant of the fact that they are not the only claimants to Imam Aḥmad's creed.

¹²¹ Two examples Dr. Qadhi offered were Ibn 'Aqīl (d. 513 A.H.) and Ibnul Jawzī (d. 597 A.H.). We know that these two stirred controversy during their time for their idiosyncratic views amongst their Ḥanbalī peers. They did not form and lead a movement since their preaching was forcefully curbed and deemed as being against the dominant stance of the Ḥanbalī school. See: Livnat Holtzman, “The miḥna of Ibn 'Aqīl (d. 513/1119) and the fitnat Ibn al-Qushayrī (d. 514/1120),” In: *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Schmidtke, 2016; and, Merlin Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzī's Kitāb Akhbār aṣ-Ṣiḡāt*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 66 & 295.

¹²² The Kharijites

¹²³ 'Alī b. Abi Ṭālib (r)

¹²⁴ I believe the statement of 'Alī (r) which Dr. Qadhi is referring to is the following:

لکم علینا ثلاث، لا نمنعکم مساجد اللہ أن تذكروا فیہا اسم اللہ، ولا نمنعکم الفیء ما دامت أیدیکم مع أیدینا، ولا نبدوکم بقتال

“There are three rights you have over us: that we do not prevent you from mentioning Allah's name in the mosques, that we do not withhold from you your provision from the

wonders what *firqa*¹²⁵, again let me be brutally honest, whether they are hard-core Salafis or hard-core Sufis or hard-core Ash‘arīs, which group would be so open-minded as to say: ‘You know what, we disagree with you, but you go ahead and as long as you don’t harm anybody else and you’re on your own, that’s your business and we can’t force you to follow our understanding.’”¹²⁶

Dr. Qadhi’s analogy here is odd, to say the least. ‘Alī’s (r) attempt to avoid a bloody entanglement with the Kharijites who were a force to be reckoned with thousands of armed men in no way entailed that he *legitimized* their views with some kind of “let’s agree to disagree” attitude.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the Kharijites were secluded from the main body of Muslims, as they did not mingle with the community, let alone were permitted to preach their views openly amongst them. The tension was there, and the Kharijites’ stance was undoubtedly deemed to be blameworthy and was accordingly condemned by the Sahabah.¹²⁸ And most of the prominent “hard-core” Salafis, Sufis, and Ash‘arīs Dr. Qadhi is alluding to do not advocate for the physical coercion of others to adopt their stances anyway, so that is an irrelevant comparison to make.

Dr. Qadhi is conflating between political decisions that have more severe and wide-ranging ramifications with social and theological decisions applied by individuals towards others. He is conflating between acknowledging the right of a group to co-exist peacefully with validating and being indifferent towards the stances of that respective group. These are two different things, and Dr. Qadhi’s analogy fails to make this very fundamental distinction.

Dr. Qadhi on Najdism and Taṣawwuf

Dr. Qadhi said:

“The only main movement that became anti-taṣawwuf frankly in the history of Islam is the Najdi movement. The Najdi movement is the only movement that took taṣawwuf as an enemy. The entire, the hook line and sinker, the baby, and the bathwater.”¹²⁹

Firstly, it is difficult to assess this claim’s accuracy when neither “taṣawwuf” here is being clearly defined in terms of its scope, nor have any Najdi scholars’ statements been

fay’ (spoils acquired without fighting) as long as you stand with us in solidarity, and that we do not initiate fighting against you.”

¹²⁵ Theological group

¹²⁶ Class 1, 26:30-27:18

¹²⁷ Lest we forget that ‘Alī (r) relayed one of the harshest aḥādīth concerning the Kharijites. See: Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Book 12, Hadith 199; available [here](#).

¹²⁸ To see how several of the Sahabah condemned, warned from, and boycotted the Kharijites, see Asmā’ as-Suwaylim, *Mawqif as-Ṣaḥābah min al-Furqa wal-Firaq*, (Riyadh: Dār al-Faḍīla, 2005), pp. 458-465

¹²⁹ Class 7, 1:43:02-1:43:16

furnished demonstrating what they have meant by the “taṣawwuf” that they have allegedly *totally* rejected.¹³⁰

Secondly, Dr. Qadhi has also chosen his words carefully here when he qualified his statement by saying “movement,” which implies that it is possible that the “Najdi movement” does have classical precedence in the form of individual opinions of scholars for its views towards taṣawwuf. If so, then why would it be an issue of concern if a movement, such as Najdism, was the first movement in its entirety to agree with a particular opinion which has precedence anyway?¹³¹

Conclusion

The original goal Dr. Qadi set out to achieve in his course is a noble one; namely, to expose Muslims to beneficial academic Islamic scholarship outside the traditional works they are usually accustomed to in order to broaden their horizons, be better informed of different approaches to Islamic studies, and to develop and harness their critical skills, and overall academic acumen. Nevertheless, it was my impression that Dr. Qadhi fell extremely short of achieving this goal for a number of reasons which I demonstrated in this article and which could be summarized as follows:

- Dr. Qadhi’s biases were too suffused into his teachings during this course. Indeed, we all have our biases, but if the course’s purpose is to be ‘different’ by being critical and academically neutral, then a greater effort on Dr. Qadhi’s part should have been exerted towards restricting himself to teaching the syllabus academically with less preaching and venting on his part.
- Dr. Qadhi’s arbitrariness when determining the legitimacy of viewpoints is problematic. He did not provide and prove what the boundaries of Islamic orthodoxy are. Dr. Qadhi’s deductions and analogies could be very wanting at times, for he committed several non-sequiturs by making dubious inferences about what constitutes valid stances by appealing to irrelevant determinant factors.
- Dr. Qadhi’s dereliction by neglecting to cultivate in his students a stronger sense of pride and confidence in their own Islamic scholarly tradition. In fact, Dr. Qadhi has done the exact opposite by casting doubts on the general credibility of traditional

¹³⁰ In fact, it appears that Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdul Wahhāb was quite nuanced when it came to his stance on taṣawwuf and acknowledged its place as a valid Islamic science. He even explicitly stated that he does not unconditionally reject Sufi *ṭuruq* and seeking spiritual purification of our inner selves. See: ‘Abdul Ḥafīẓ al-Makkī, *Mawqif A’immat al-Ḥarakah as-Salaḥiyyah min at-Taṣawwuf waṣ-Ṣūfiyyah*, (Cairo: Dar as-Salam, 3rd ed., 2001), pp. 15-20; available [here](#).

¹³¹ There is no shortage of classical scholars who have condemned Sufis and several of their practices. For a survey of such scholars who did so in the sixth and eighth Islamic centuries, see the following two studies respectively: Muḥammad al-Juwayr, *Juhūd ‘Ulamā’ as-Salaḥiyyah min at-Taṣawwuf waṣ-Ṣūfiyyah*, (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2003) & Jum‘a al-‘Unayzi, *Juhūd ‘Ulamā’ as-Salaḥiyyah min at-Taṣawwuf waṣ-Ṣūfiyyah*, published in 2002. Even Dr. Qadhi himself earlier admits that Imam Aḥmad rejected and was uncomfortable with al-Muḥāsibī’s “Sunni taṣawwuf” (Class 3, 41st minute).

Islamic scholarship. There was also a lack of sufficient reverence shown towards prominent scholars in our tradition, which only served to diminish their deserved status.

- Dr. Qadhi's failure to intellectually equip the students sufficiently to the point whereby they are capable of safeguarding their orthodox beliefs from intellectual attacks. He would encourage his students to embrace a particular critical methodology and then expose them to arguments, which he at times does not provide them with the resources and intellectual arsenal required to overcome. At a certain point, he would capriciously stop being 'critical' and tell his students that he [arbitrarily] draws a red line for himself in order not to cross the bounds of orthodoxy, yet if one were to actually listen to him and becomes 'critical' in the manner he prods him to be, he would technically have no reason to agree with Dr. Qadhi's non-evidentially backed and adhoc conclusions on several matters.

In light of this, we hope Dr. Qadhi and others could reflect on and benefit from what has been mentioned in this article and that it motivates them to be warier of the dangers of negligently navigating between traditional and Western academic Islamic scholarship.